

The Heirs of Ishmael

731^x tant Euphrates. It was as if a tremendous fire were
221^x sweeping up from the heart of Arabia, and man and
beast were in headlong flight to escape from its consum-
ing breath.

731^x The eternal law of Nature was being fulfilled: death
221^x to the weak, the maimed, and the forsaken. The strong
574 trampled over the weak, gaining from their victims
● 261 fresh strength and endurance to push on. Though famine
ravaged the land, the slaves in the camp of the nomad
chieftain saw to it that the guests of their master lacked
nothing. Every day for breakfast I was served a dish
262 very like our scrambled eggs, made of several tiny eggs
252 of the sand grouse. It had a particular gamy tang, and
so has a similar dish made of the much larger bustard
eggs. Fresh truffles were roasted in the embers of weeds
and camel dung, their rinds splitting in the heat. Every
morning I found beside my bowl of milk a basin of wild
honey, with thick dabs of sheep's-milk butter floating
in it. As I was eating, I watched the slave baking bread.
He poured a porridge-like mixture of wheat flour,
crushed seeds and herbs on to a hot, convex iron plate,
resting on three stones over the fire. The batter first
spread out on this grid, and then wrinkled up under the
heat and formed large griddle cakes, brown and thick,
which, one by one, the Negro peeled off and threw into
our laps. We tore off strips from these wafer-like, char-
coal flakes, crisp at the edges, rolled them around our
fingers, and with these morsels fished the butter out of
731^x the honey. We strangers and guests certainly did not
574 suffer want. Most of the Rualas, on the contrary, and
261 even the chieftains, actually went hungry.

Famine and War

It was touching to see a tribesman, himself half-starved, bring to his *sbeykb's* tent a hare or a gazelle, or other game, as an offering for the sustenance of his chieftain's guests. Even children and women came by every day, and from a clothes-bundle laid down a handful of truffles or a wild pigeon. Once a boy brought me a large, fat lizard which he had killed with a stone, and later a rock-badger and a yellow-headed vulture. The boy asked if, in such time of famine, he might presume to offer me such animals for food. 731^x
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"... and so it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites and the children of the East, even they came up against them, and they encamped against them and destroyed the increase of the earth ... *for they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without numbers. ...*"
(Judges vi, 3-5.)

With gnawing stomachs and with drooping spirits, the Ruala followed their dying herds. Ever farther northwards they pressed on, close to the enemies' territory. Every day hundreds of camels and also many people fell by the wayside, while the survivors strained all the more desperately to reach the hills of Abu Rijmeyn. The weaker remained where they fell. The moment a camel, at the end of its strength, commenced to stagger and threatened to fall, riders in the neighbourhood leapt from their mounts and, dashing up to the poor creature, put it out of its misery. Meanwhile the others marched 731^x
221^x

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The Land of Promise

EVERY EVENING THE Ruala occupied new pastures— 751^x
such as they were—farther north. The drought in 261●
each camp was terrible. Long since I had given up the
luxury of wiping my face in the morning with a mois-
tened face-rag. In the Amir's household Mnahi was
charged with rationing the water supply. He knew
nothing of liquid measures, but he soon devised one for
his purpose. He put a pebble, which he always kept
handy, into a small wooden bowl and, for each of us
tent-mates, poured over it just enough water to cover
it. It was precious little.

As with the water, so with the milk. Camels which, [231]
on good pasture, used to give between four and five
quarts of milk a day, now gave less than one. To save
this little for themselves and their horses, the Ruala had
to kill the new-born camel calves. The herds were a
sorry sight—emaciated, jaded, covered with dust.

I was talking with the *sbiyukbs* about certain grazing 000
lands northeast of us when Faris, who had overheard our
conversation, said to me: "Let us go and explore Abu
Rijmeyn and the farther hills and take a look at the
pasture, so as to reassure our people." We decided then
and there to journey into that promising, but forbidden,
land.

This reconnaissance, which we made by motor—Faris,

CHAPTER V

FOOD

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All the Rwala are familiar with hunger and fear it, since they know that it is difficult for the hungry to overcome those who have eaten their fill. They have a saying: "The attack of the sated on the hungry is very vile, *fatt aš-šab'ân 'ala-l-ğē'ân fatten žūwi*." But nobody can see hunger, and therefore nobody can deride a hungry man as easily as one who is naked or insufficiently clothed. If a man comes half-naked to his true friend, it grieves him, for either the man has been robbed or else he pays no heed to the dictates of decency; hence the saying: "Go hungry to your friend, but do not go naked to him; *it rafīzak ġē'ân w-lâ ta'tih 'arijân*."

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The Rwala know that Heaven is the abode of God who looks after them and supplies them with food, while the human enemy, who begrudges them everything, inhabits the earth upon which we walk. A father often reminds his son: "He who provides thee with everything dwells in Heaven; he who hinders thee dwells on the earth upon which thou walkest; *azzâk bes-sema' w-al-hâsed bel-waṭa*." It is useless to be overanxious about the things for which all long. On every occasion Allâh cries out to man: "O my servant, thou hast desires and I have desires, but all thou canst do is to carry out the things that I desire; *jâ 'abdi ent trid w-ana-rid w-lâ lak illa mâ-rid*." Man therefore comforts himself with the proverb: "I desire, but Allâh will nevertheless carry out what he desires; *ana-rid w-allâh ja'mal mâ jerid*."

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Hunger forces a man to theft. To take from an enemy or a stranger all that he has is not a sin, but to steal anything from a neighbor or fellow tribesman is a sin, and Allâh does not bless the thing that He has forbidden, *mâ bârak allâh bel-ḥarâm*.

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The Rwala eat regularly twice a day. Their main and most abundant meal is supper, *'aša*. They have this meal after sunset. Shortly before noon there is lunch, *ṣada*, at which they merely drink milk or eat what is left of supper or a piece of bread from the previous day, *bâjet*. Only for im-

262 Milk is the chief nutriment of the Rwala. Many families
 272 live exclusively on it for months at a time; they suffer hunger
 when there is no abundant pasture and the camels accordingly
 have little to eat. As they cannot then provide themselves
 with other food in the interior of the desert, they seek it in
 the settled territory. The Rwala say: "We feed our children on
 the sour milk of our camels,
*mesaẓẓemin 'ejālna min leben
 helālna."*



FIG. 22—A water trough, *hawz*,
 on a camel (see p. 71).

WHEAT AND OTHER GRAINS

The Bedouins are convinced
 that the *fellāḥin* are obliged
 to supply them with food.
 Everywhere the remark may
 be heard: "The *fellāḥ* must
 provide food for the Bedouins,
al-bedū 'ejšathom 'ala-l-fellāḥ."
 If the *fellāḥ* does not give it to
 them of his own free will, they
 have the right to take every-

thing they find, and therefore they declare: "Take from the
fellāḥ whatever ye find (or like), *ḥoḍ min al-fellāḥ mā lāḥ."*

Before the Rwala depart into the interior of the desert,
ješarrezūn, they provide themselves with wheat necessary for
 sustenance. The allowance is one load per person, the load
 being the amount carried by a camel, about 150 kilograms.
 In addition to this the ordinary Bedouin carries an additional
 load for his guests. The head chief usually has fifty to sixty
 loads of flour and wheat, because he has to feed not only nu-
 merous guests but also many of his fellow tribesmen whose
 supplies enemies have stolen. These are known as *ḡa'uf* or
ḥalāl. ~~The men go from tent to tent and feed as guests; the~~
 women beseech the mistress of the tent: "Give me supper, lit-
 tle sister! give me supper! *'aššini jā ḥajje 'aššini.*" When they
 receive the wheat they carry it to the children and the sick.

From the wheat is prepared every day a food called *'ejš*,
 bread being rarely baked. The tribesmen grind the wheat
 grains themselves, only the chiefs taking milled flour into the
 interior of the desert. The Rwala do not believe that milled
 flour is genuine wheat, for they say: "Wheat is genuine only
 as long as it is in grain, *al-ḡamḥ allī ba'ad ḥabben
 saḥih."*

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as long as it is in grain, *al-kumh alli ba'ad habben ṣaḥiḥ.*" 252
 The wheat is beaten in a wooden mortar, *mihbās*, with a pestle, *amūd*, or it is ground in a small mill, *ṛha*. These mills 412
 are made by the Rwala women, who hew two pieces of basalt 404
 or lava into shape, hollow out an aperture, provide them with
 an iron axle, *ḥalb*, and make a wooden handle, *hādi*, the mill
 now being completed. If they
 wish to use it for grinding,
 they spread a piece of leather
 or closely woven stuff, *tḥāl*, on
 the ground, put the mill on
 it, pick up the grains in the
 left hand, shake them into the
 aperture in the upper stone,
al-fowka, and the flour falls
 into the lower one, *at-taḥta*,
 and upon the outspread rug,
jika 'ala-t-*tḥāl*. While grind-
 ing they sing simple songs
 such as:

"As the mill handle turns
 (and yet does not leave the
 lower stone, would that this were so among people!) may each
 woman possess her beloved; 'ūd ar-raḥa mā dīrah killen tāḥod
 'aṣīrah." Or:

"Today I am grieved, but the servant of the Bountiful
 is (appointed by him as) our guardian; *al-jowm āna waḡ-
 'āna 'abd al-kerīm mwaṣṣāna.*"

They never grind for the purpose of storing up supplies; 251
 at the most they grind enough to leave something over for 261 ●
 bread to be offered to guests for breakfast on the morrow.

If they wish to bake bread, they shake the flour on a 252
ṣaḥn-pan (or 'elbe), salt it, add water, and knead it into a
 dough in a *muḡmar*. This they mix into a large loaf, take
 it out of the *muḡmar*, place it on a piece of leather or on
 a cloak, turn the *muḡmar* or *ṣaḥn* over, pull off a piece of
 the dough, and from it knead a large thin cake, *tetaḥḥen*, on
 the *ṣaḥn*. When it has covered the whole of the *ṣaḥn*, a woman
 seizes it in both hands and, throwing it up in the air, draws
 it out more and more, till sometimes it is as thin as paper,
tenassef tansif. The ready-made cake she places on a *minsāf*.
 Before this she takes a deep bulging sheet of iron, *āḡ*, about



FIG. 23—A leather bucket, *delw*
 (see p. 72).

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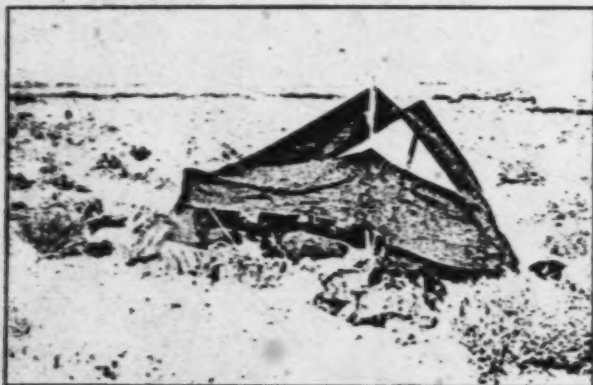
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Instead of wheat the poorer of the Rwala obtain white sorghum, *dera' bêza'*, which costs half as much and can be used in exactly the same way as wheat. From it they bake bread called *fur mud*, boil *'ejš* known as *raẓiẓa*, roast the grains to *hamisa*, and eat the plain flour as *lehme*.

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FIG. 24—A small tent, *nuz* (see p. 72).

Semhne or *sebīb* is the seed of the different varieties of *semh* plant. It takes the place of both wheat and *dera'*, and from it food can be prepared in exactly the same way as from these. Those who have no other food and neither taste the seed of the *ad-da'ā'* variety of *semh* nor eat the *al-hawwa'* herb, even though they may be tormented by hunger, are generally regarded as being hardy; *hwa walad mā dāk ad-da'ā'-w-lā akal al-hawwa' jōm ḡā'*.

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LOCUSTS, DATES, SALT, WATER, EDIBLE PLANTS

For the poorer Rwala locusts, *ḡerād*, are an important article of diet. The large green varieties often cover shrubs by the myriad and do not move till the dew has evaporated. The Rwala women come and throw handfuls of locusts into large bags, tie them up, dig a narrow, deep trench, *būra*, and make a fire in it. When the bottom of the trench is covered with glowing ashes they shake the locusts into it, shouting: "Father of roasting, roast them! *jā-ba-l-hmes ehemseh*." The dead locusts are dried in the sun and either ground immediately

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